

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at an Installation Ceremony for Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius and Secretary of Commerce Gary F. Locke

May 1, 2009

The President. Hello, everybody. Please, everybody have a seat. This is a big family here—[*laughter*—feel a bit like a wedding, you know. [*Laughter*]

We're here this afternoon to formally fill out my Cabinet with my new Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, and my Secretary of Commerce, Gary Locke. Secretary Sebelius and Secretary Locke were actually sworn-in before today, but around here, we like to make sure we get it right. [*Laughter*] I had to do it twice, and so now we make everybody do it twice. [*Laughter*]

When I announced Kathleen as my choice for HHS Secretary, I said that one of her responsibilities would be to make certain our Nation is prepared for a pandemic. What I didn't expect was that a serious H1N1 flu outbreak would be her first assignment. But it is, and that's why on Tuesday, only hours after being confirmed by the Senate, she was sworn-in by my side in the Oval Office and then went straight to the Situation Room to get to work dealing with this emergency.

But managing crises is nothing new for Kathleen. She has plenty of experience doing just that as Governor of Kansas, and that expertise has enabled her to hit the ground running. She's been closely monitoring and carefully managing the situation, along with her Acting Director at the CDC, Dr. Richard Besser, and Secretary Janet Napolitano. They're making sure all Federal agencies are coordinating their efforts, and they'll keep the American people updated over the days ahead.

Experts tell us this is a unique virus with the potential to have a great impact, and as long as it remains a potentially grave threat, we're going to take it very seriously. And obviously, we hope the precautions we're taking prove unnecessary, but better safe than sorry. We will take every appropriate action to make sure that the American people are safe.

And if the flu outbreak isn't enough, Secretary Sebelius has a lot of other challenges on her plate, from guaranteeing the safety of our Nation's food and drug supply, to keeping America at the forefront of medical research, to helping to lead our effort to ensure that every American has access to quality, affordable health care.

As a former State insurance commissioner and Governor, Kathleen has been on the frontlines of our health care crisis. And she shares my belief that if we're going to cut costs for families and businesses, maintain quality, and improve the long-term economic health of our Nation, we must realize that fixing what's wrong with our health care system is no longer just a moral imperative; it's an economic and fiscal imperative. If we want to make companies more competitive and reduce our budget deficits in the future, we need to tackle health care reform right now.

The reform we're talking about won't focus on Democratic ideas or Republican ideas, but on ideas that work. And that's precisely the kind of commitment to bipartisan accomplishment that Kathleen embodies. She is, after all, the daughter of a Democratic Governor and the daughter-in-law of a Republican Congressman. Her father, who is here, former Ohio Governor John Gilligan—I just want to acknowledge him—where did he go? There he is, right in front.

Give him a big round of applause. *[Applause]* He and Kathleen make up the first father-daughter pair of Governors in the United States.

But Kathleen has a—forged a reputation for bipartisan problem-solving in her own right. Time and again, she bridged the partisan divide and worked with a Republican legislature to get things done for the people of Kansas.

And Kathleen possesses the patience and understanding honed by nearly 35 years of marriage to her husband Gary Sebelius—*[laughter]*—the former first dude of Kansas—*[laughter]*—the grace and good humor required to raise sons like Ned and John, and the kind of pragmatic wisdom you tend to find in a Kansan. She's already a tremendous asset to my Cabinet. She has hit the ground running. I look forward to working with her in the years to come.

Now, when I chose Gary Locke for my Commerce Secretary, I mentioned his own remarkable story. More than 100 years ago, Gary's grandfather left China on a steamship bound for America and found work as a domestic servant in Washington State. He raised a son, Gary's father Jimmy, who would go on to fight in World War II, return home and open a grocery store, and later raise a family of his own.

Gary worked his way through Yale with the help of scholarships and student loans, earned his law degree, and returned to Washington State to devote his life to public service. And when he took the oath of office as Governor of Washington, he did so in the State capitol building not 1 mile from the home where his grandfather worked as a servant all those years ago. And that's how I know Gary shares my deep, abiding belief in the American Dream, because he's lived it too.

He's since proceeded to honor the family's legacy with years of distinguished service as one of the Nation's most able and forward-thinking Governors. He worked to promote economic development and attract businesses to Washington that would create the jobs of the 21st century, jobs in science and technology, agriculture and clean energy. And I'm proud of what he and his team at the Department of Commerce are doing to help create conditions in which our workers can prosper, our businesses can compete and thrive, and our economy can grow.

I want to thank his lovely wife, Mona, their adorable children, Emily, Dylan, and Madeline, for being here—thank you, guys—and for the sacrifices they've made to send Gary from one Washington to another, especially Emily, because I know it's harder when you're older. *[Laughter]* And I'm grateful to Gary for his service, because I know how hard it is to be away from your family.

And my Cabinet is now full of energetic innovators like Kathleen and Gary, a team of leaders who push the envelope every day because they know that whether the wind is in our face or at our backs, America does not settle; we always march forward. I am thrilled to have them by my side as we continue the work of turning our economy around and laying a new foundation for growth that delivers on the change the American people asked for and the promise of a new and better day ahead.

So with that, I'm going to turn it over to another extraordinary member of my team, my Vice President, Joe Biden, to administer the oaths.

Joe.

Vice President Joe Biden. Thank you, Mr. President.

[At this point, the Vice President administered the oath.]

The President. Thank you, everybody. Have a great weekend.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:50 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Homeland Security Janet A. Napolitano.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Commerce, Department of :: Secretary Gary F. Locke, installation ceremony; Addresses and Remarks : Health and Human Services, Department of :: Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, installation ceremony.

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